

SUMMARY -- HB 275

- (1) Provides an incentive for driving with headlights turned on during daylight hours in the form of a 20% reduction in fines for speeding violations; e.g., a \$20 fine would be adjusted to \$16, a \$40 fine to \$32, etc.
- (2) This incentive would apply to state and federal highways only.
- (3) Reductions would apply only to speeding violations (not reckless driving, DUI, etc.)
- (4) The adjustment is discretionary, i.e., may be cancelled by the officer issuing the citation at his discretion. (amendment)
- (5) The program will sunset in two years unless renewed by the legislature. (amendment)

COMMENTS: Vehicle visibility plays a major role in highway safety, particularly with regard to head-on crashes and fatalities. Especially in low light situations, the explanation, too often, is "I just didn't see him." This, of course, is exacerbated when drivers suffer from poor eyesight.

Daytime headlights are the best solution to this problem, and can have a major impact on reducing highway deaths in the state of Montana. Studies have documented crash reductions of up to 18 percent through daytime use of lights, with 12 percent declines in fatal collisions with cyclists and pedestrians. Because of these proven safety advantages, many newer vehicles are now equipped with automatic daytime "running lights," although the majority of vehicles on our roads still do not have this function.

Mandating daytime headlights would be an enforcement nightmare, and such a law would not be supported by the majority of Montanans. This bill takes the opposite approach, recognizing that people respond better to incentives than to punitive measures. The most important thing this bill would accomplish is to prompt a change in people's driving habits. Although the incentive is a modest one (typically, \$4 to \$8), people are likely to say "why not? A savings is a savings." Once the habit is formed, it will become automatic, and will influence others at the same time. For this reason, a sunset provision is recommended, as it may only take 2 years for this measure to have its positive effects and begin saving lives.